Unit .29

Session .04

# Living out the Gospel of Jesus

## Scripture

## James 2:14-26

**14** What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone
claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such
faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is without
clothes and lacks daily food **16** and one of you says to
them, "Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed," but
you don't give them what the body needs, what good is
it? **17** In the same way faith, if it does not have works, is
dead by itself. **18** But someone will say, "You have faith,
and I have works." Show me your faith without works,
and I will show you faith by my works. **19** You believe
that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and
they shudder. **20** Senseless person! Are you willing to
learn that faith without works is useless? **21** Wasn't
Abraham our father justified by works in offering Isaac
his son on the altar? **22** You see that faith was active
together with his works, and by works, faith was made
complete, **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says,
**Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as
righteousness, and he was called God's friend.** **24** You
see that a person is justified by works and not by faith
alone. **25** In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute
also justified by works in receiving the messengers and
sending them out by a different route? **26** For just as
the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without
works is dead.

## Intro Options

**Main Point:**
**True faith is always demonstrated in the way we live.**

## Option 1

Break your students into small groups to perform skits. Here's the scenario: one person in the skit has just won a million-dollar lottery. He is coming to the appropriate office to claim their winnings, but he has to prove his identity. How does he do so? Encourage students to come up with creative and different ways the person might prove his or her identity. Apart from using an ID or driver's license, what other methods might they use? Let them prepare and share their skits.

Talk about what methods people used (friends as witnesses, maybe answering questions only they would know). In all these instances, did what the people did or brought to prove their identity make them the winner? No, it only proved they were indeed the winners. If a stranger had the winner's driver's license, that stranger couldn't claim the prize; the driver's license doesn't win the prize. The winner's identity does. The driver's license only authenticates the winner's identity. In the same way, as our lesson today will show, our works do not save us, but they do prove that we are saved. Works show our faith lived out, just like a driver's license or a witness shows our true identity.

## Option 2

Your church has come up with the idea of making a short guide entitled, "Faith Illustrated." It's to be a publication with minimal words that can be given to an explorer, a new Christian, or even to a missionary's audience to explain what the concept of faith looks like in the Christian life.

Your students are to supply the illustration pages. Each student should make a drawing showing an illustration of faith; they can use a single-sentence caption underneath, though it's preferable if the picture needs no caption at all. The church wants two sections to the guide: analogies and examples. Half of the students should give analogies for faith; the other half should give examples.

Analogies might be trusting in a chair when we sit on it (an act of faith), or like mailing a letter (trusting the postal service to send it). Examples might be obeying and honoring our parents even we think we know better (trusting that God knows best) or praising God even in suffering (we trust that God is up to our good).

Once students have made their pages, assemble them together into a book and go through it. What kinds of scenes did students draw? How would the book look differently if it were entitled, "Works Illustrated"? The examples section probably would look similar because, as today's lesson will show, works are how we show our faith.

# TEACHING PLAN

## Read James 2:14-17.

"Less talk and more action." This phrase lines up well with the Book of James, a faith-fueled letter about love in action."Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22). James encouraged his poor brothers and sisters to suffer injustice in such a way that their steadfast faith served as an example to their oppressors.

- **How do our actions prove our faith in Christ?**

James also rebuked the rich for showing favoritism (2:1-9). For James, and all the Apostles, how we treat the marginalized of society is an indicator of our faith. James understood that, through the redemptive work of Jesus, the barriers that separate people based on ethnicity, class, and gender have been crucified on the cross of Jesus (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). Therefore, God's people should treat each other with love and dignity as brothers and sisters.

James wrote to the Jewish believers telling them that faith in the Messiah transforms the way they love and serve the vulnerable and weak. In the same way, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live righteous lives and to provide for the needs of our poor brothers and sisters (Jas. 2:14-17). Being gracious and generous to the poor is an act of worship, but the rich in these congregations were not loving their poor brothers and sisters.

We know that neither wealth nor power is evil. However, James was speaking to people who used wealth, power, and privilege in the wrong way:

- To show favoritism to the wealthy over the poor (Jas. 2:1-4,9)
- To dishonor and oppress the poor both inside and outside the church family (v. 6)
- To neglect the poor by not providing food and clothing for their brothers and sisters in the household of faith (vv. 14-16)
- To exploit the poor through fraud and withholding wages that were rightly earned

James said those who do these things "blaspheme"—to speak of or treat irreverently—the name of Jesus (Jas. 2:7). James also reminds believers that God blesses us so that we would love our neighbors as ourselves. Love is not just a word we use, but the way we live toward others every moment in our lives.

- **What are some examples of needs people may have? As followers of Jesus, how should we respond to someone in need?**

## Read James 2:18-19.

James made clear to his audience that even the demons believe that there is one God—but they do not love God. An intellectual understanding is simply not enough. Our love for God is revealed in our love for our neighbors. Faith, in other words, is expressed by the good works we do for others. James was not bashing the rich for being imperfect; he was rebuking them for blaspheming Jesus by not repenting of the ways they had treated the poor (Jas. 2:6-7). One of the signs of true saving faith—a faith that justifies—is love for our neighbor regardless of their status in society.

# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**
**True faith is always demonstrated in the way we live.**

## James 2

"James turns to another realistic example to illustrate what he means when he speaks of the need for our actions to match what we claim to believe (2:14). Suppose there is someone in the church who is in desperate need of food or clothing. Other believers wish them well and pronounce blessings on them, but don't lift a finger to meet their physical needs. In this case, the believers' faith is just talk (2:15-16; see also Matt. 25:41-46). Merely talking about doing good or wishing people well is not the same as obeying the fundamental command to love one's neighbor. Faith that is not accompanied by practical action is not a living faith but is dead (2:17)."[1]

"The indirect interlocutor, the man who "claims to have faith," is crucial for James's argument. A person might say he or she has faith, but what is that claim without the deeds that reveal all authentic faith? Mere profession, because of sin, does not count. The faith Jesus lived and taught is at stake. Acts of mercy are the only demonstration of faith. The implied claimant does not say, 'I have no deeds'; rather to James and any other observers, none are in evidence. James's deeds of faith are not at all what Paul meant by 'works of the law.' The question James placed before his hearers is very different from the issues before Paul. James was concerned with the demonstration of faith in Jesus through works of mercy."[2]

## 99 Essential Doctrines (p. 72, DDG)

### Justification and Works

Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Eph. 2:10). Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

# TEACHING PLAN

- **What are some ways you can demonstrate love for a neighbor on an ongoing basis?**

Some say the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. By comparing those who have faith without works to demons, perhaps James was making a similar point. The opposite of saving faith is not necessarily the ultimate expression of evil, but a lack of good works. Genuine, saving faith is always demonstrated through a life of active love. Even demons possess a faith that elicits some type of noticeable response—in response to God's truth, they shudder. Apparently, some of James readers weren't responsive at all.

- **When have you been unresponsive to the truth of God? Why is this such a serious issue?**

**Read James 2:20-26.**

James informed the rich believers that, if they failed to love the poor among them, they were acting like senseless people. "Senseless" in this verse means, "meaninglessness." The rich in the church believed the right things, but their faith (even their lives) was meaningless. They weren't living out God's purpose for their lives, because they failed to show love to the poor. James asked those walking in disobedience, "Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless?" One sign of our responsiveness to Jesus' lordship and grace is our willingness to learn how to live out the gospel.

- **What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "useless faith"?**

In this passage, James used both the wealthy Abraham and the poor Rahab as examples of how to put action behind faith. God called Abraham, and, because of his belief, Abraham obeyed (Gen. 22). Rahab, a social outcast (a Gentile prostitute) put actions to her faith (Josh. 2, 6). Both Abraham and Rahab proved their faith with their works.

The grace that saves is the grace that sanctifies. and through us God wants to show the world a picture of His love, justice, reconciliation, and mercy. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, and not by our own works (Eph. 2:8-9). But we need to remember—all real faith will be made evident in the ways we live.

# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**
**True faith is always demonstrated in the way we live.**

## James 2

"James explores the nature of saving faith. There is a 'faith' that cannot save. Such faith has kind words but no deeds, no aid for the naked and hungry. It is 'dead' because it rests in ideas, not in a life dependent upon and reflective of Jesus (vv. 14-17). Orthodox theology 'apart from works is useless' (v. 20). Demons prove this, since they hold to orthodox ideas about God yet live in terror since they don't trust him (v. 19) … James does not suggest, then, that faith plus works equals justification. He agrees with Paul that faith alone justifies. But he knows there is a so-called 'faith' that is dangerous because it deludes but does not justify. He contrasts that with the faith that does justify—a living faith that by its very nature reflects the One on whom our faith rests, delighting to love others in concrete ways."[3]

### Activity

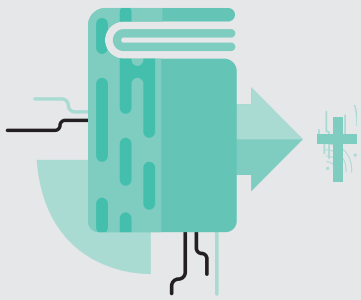
As a large group, come up with two lists. First, come up with different roles your students might live out in a typical week (students, children, and so on). For the second list, come up with things Christians trust: for example, that God is in control of all things, or that Jesus is their righteousness, or that sin doesn't really satisfy, or that lying is bad, etc.

Have the students form small groups to make skits. Their job is to choose one item from each list. They should then make a skit based on what they chose with two scenes: in the first scene, someone has dead faith (without works); in the second, someone has real faith (faith with works). For example, if they choose "athlete" from the first list, they should show a scene where the athlete has dead faith; maybe she knows she's supposed to treat the other team kindly, but she still fouls them or somehow wrongs them. In the second scene, the athlete might help an opponent up off the ground, or play fairly when she could get away with something while the umpire's back is turned. For a second example, if they chose "God is always good" from the second list, in the first scene, someone might complain about their circumstances or their family situation. In the second scene, that person would still feel the pain, but they would make the best of the situation and have a better attitude as they interact with their family because their faith is alive. If any students really want to work overtime, they can choose one role from the first list and one belief from the second and combine them in their two scenes.

Have students prepare and share their two-scene skits. Afterward, debrief. In real life, do we look more like the first scene or more like the second? Between the first scenes and the second scenes, which had more works? Why might this be? How can we authenticate our faith with works this week? How do we go about our works being sure they are acts of faith and not acts of our human will?

## (p. 74, DDG) Christ Connection

Salvation only comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and not from works (Eph. 2:8-9). However, true faith leads to good works in the life of the believer, verifying the reality of that faith in order to bring God glory and draw others to faith in Christ as well.



## LIVING OUT THE GOSPEL

True faith is always demonstrated in the way we live.

## JESUS CONNECTION

Salvation from sin comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and not from works (Eph. 2:8-9). However, true faith leads to good works in the life of the believer, verifying that faith to be real. True faith brings glory to God and draws others to faith in Christ.

## LIFEWISE QUALITY

KINDNESS – Being considerate, generous and compassionate toward others.

## HEAD

Why is it so important that a follower of Jesus has both faith and works?

How did Abraham's actions show his faith?

## HEART

Why is the way we treat others an accurate way to tell whether our faith is alive or dead?

Titus 3:4–5 says, "When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us." How does faith in God prompt us to show kindness to others as He showed it to us?

## HANDS

God has called us to be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32). Choose one of the people or groups below and brainstorm 2–3 ways you can show kindness to them this week, like a "random acts of kindness" challenge. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you actually put the ideas into practice this week.

- A parent or trusted adult
- A friend or teammate who is struggling
- A nonprofit group in your area
- The cafeteria workers in your school